

VZCZCXRO9839
OO RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHDK #0871/01 1901604
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 091604Z JUL 09
FM AMEMBASSY DAKAR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2725
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DAKAR 000871

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

STATE FOR AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL/AE AND INR/AA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [SG](#)

SUBJECT: Challenges within Senegal's Public Tertiary Educational System

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Universit Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) is generally billed as Senegal's premier institution of higher learning. However, recent student strikes have illustrated some of the glaring problems evident within the public education system. Overcrowding and mismanagement have left the University struggling to deal with unmotivated students and uncommitted teachers. A lack of accommodation, poor transportation, and rampant corruption perturbs student life. Additionally, UCAD is falling behind private institutions which have embraced reform and innovation without any government intervention or impetus. Reforms towards structuring the system into a more efficient system are slated for next year. End Summary.

Strikes on Campus

¶2. (SBU) UCAD enjoys the prestige of being one of West Africa's most highly regarded educational institutions. However, this reputation is being eroded as the student population has swelled to an estimated 70,000+. The University's infrastructure was initially constructed to handle approximately 15,000 students. The current situation is causing widespread strain as overcrowding and nonpayment of scholarships has resulted in several student-led protests and strikes. A third-year pharmacy student observed, "It has become the de facto policy that in order for us to achieve anything we must strike. The Government of Senegal (GOS) actually incites us to strike because this is the only time when they listen to us and take action." The general consensus among the faculty and administration is that a "with us or against us" attitude has developed with the students making it difficult for any dialogue to take place. The faculty meanwhile remains aloof and does not seem to be committed to establishing a high level of rapport with students towards addressing their issues.

Educational Access for all... But at What Cost?

¶3. (SBU) The general tuition for all students is approximately 5,000 CFA (around 10 US Dollars) making it affordable for all students to register. The majority of students also receive a monthly stipend and eat subsidized meals on campus. These generous concessions have led many students to extend their education for an indefinite amount of time. Because actual on campus housing can only accommodate 7,000 students a situation whereby 10-12 students are sharing accommodations originally meant for two has been created. Classrooms are not large enough to handle such a large volume of students and many find themselves outside of the classroom during lectures. In the English Department alone, 21 professors are responsible for 7,000 students. Also within this school, students only have access to most professors during a two-hour timeframe once a week. Strangely, despite this sparse schedule the professors seem to think it is quite adequate.

High Rate of Failure and Disillusionment among Students

14. (SBU) Due to extremely low standards and selectivity for admission, the University has an astoundingly high failure rate. Many first-year students from rural areas find the overcrowding, accommodation, and transportation challenges overwhelming and end up dropping out. Over numerous conversations with students and faculty it was reiterated that during the first two years of attendance the dropout rate has been as high as eighty percent of the incoming class. After passing the first two years, students can repeat any classes they failed as many times as necessary to pass. Students have been known to take an extra year in completing their thesis work in order to take advantage of the government scholarship they are guaranteed. Students have even used these funds towards attending private schools in Dakar. Professors are only required to work six hours a week at the university and several teach at both public and private institutions in Dakar.

Private Institutions

15. (SBU) Private tertiary education is a fairly recent development within Senegal. Most of these institutions were modestly launched in the mid 1990s. There are currently four private universities and several other specialized educational institutions in the country. Poloff's visit to the private Groupe Institut Africain De Management (IAD) offered a sharp contrast to the UCAD experience.

Undergraduate tuition is 70,000 CFA a month (adding up to \$1,500 USD a year). Masters Students pay 1-1.2 million CFA respectively in their first and second years (approximately 2,190-2,628 USD a year).

While not affordable to every Senegalese student there is a clear difference in the quality of education received. IAD's 1,500 students enjoy a 10:1 student to professor ratio, a maximum of 40 students per classroom and the professor's lectures available for download on-line. In spite of these innovations, the GOS does not

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recognize private university degrees towards careers within its civil service. The GOS also does not provide any public funding towards helping make these institutions more accessible to the masses.

Comment

16. (SBU) The tertiary system of education is, in effect, broken. The university's policy of accepting all students is unsustainable. The GOS needs to allocate more resources towards vocational education so that students have more options to pursue. The current intake at vocational schools remains quite low (Dakar has only 3,000 vocational students). The system is in dire need of reform and evidence of this is rife throughout the university. In spite of this, the administration and professors are slow to act in creating innovative policies that will help staunch the current drain on the system. While the GOS continues to build an increasing number of primary and secondary schools it has neglected the tertiary system which will eventually take these students.

17. (SBU) Scholarship and subsidized food incentives are enticements for underperforming students to remain in the system forever. Smaller public universities within the country need to be increased in size so they can handle the influx of students going to university. Assistance to private universities also needs to be considered by the GOS so education can become more affordable. The future of Senegal's education is a bleak one if these issues are not properly addressed. Student protest and dissatisfaction will only become worse if the GOS does not rectify some of the issues and work to handle a system that is fatally flawed. A new system called LMD, modeled after the American educational system of credit hours per semester is scheduled to be introduced next year. This change in itself can be considered a small step toward reform within the system.

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